

1 **Washington State Department of Natural Resources**
2 **NAP Public Access Policy -- DRAFT for Public Review**
3 *(February 11, 2005)*
4

5 DISCUSSION
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7 The Washington State Legislature established a system of natural area
8 preserves (NAPs) to preserve and protect the natural heritage of the state.
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10 "All areas within the state, except those which are
11 expressly dedicated by law for preservation and
12 protection in their natural condition, are subject to
13 alteration by human activity.... It is, therefore, the
14 public policy of the state of Washington to secure
15 for the people of present and future generations the
16 benefit of an enduring resource of natural areas by
17 establishing a system of natural area preserves,
18 and to provide for the protection of these natural
19 areas." (RCW 79.70.010)
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21 Preserves are identified through an organized scientific inventory process that is
22 guided by the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan. The purpose of NAPs
23 is:
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- 25 • To protect outstanding examples of rare or vanishing terrestrial or aquatic
26 ecosystems, rare plant and animal species and unique geologic features;
- 27 • To serve as baselines against which the influences of human activities in
28 similar, but differently managed ecosystems can be compared; and
- 29 • To provide areas that are important to preserving natural features of
30 scientific or educational value.
31

32 NAPs, due to their statewide ecological significance and rarity, are a very select
33 subset of all the lands managed by the department and have high value for
34 scientific and educational purposes. These lands are not easily replaceable with
35 other lands if damaged. Some NAPs are not appropriate for public access due to
36 highly sensitive natural features or limited opportunities for locating public use
37 that would not degrade the ecological values or features of the site. However, on
38 a case-by-case basis, low levels of public access outside of environmentally
39 sensitive areas may be approved on some NAPs when consistent with the
40 conservation, research, and education goals of those NAPs.
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42 While the purposes of NAPs require public use to be strictly managed, other
43 public lands of the state, such as state parks or wildlife areas, have been

established for broader public and recreational uses. Department-managed trust lands also provide for multiple uses. Natural Resources Conservation Areas managed by the department provide additional opportunities for low-impact public use, while also protecting outstanding ecological and scenic values.

The department manages NAPs through the Natural Areas Program, in coordination with the Natural Heritage Program and the Washington State Natural Heritage Advisory Council.

POLICY

It is the policy of the department to prepare a site-specific management plan for each NAP. Such plans will give top priority to protecting the natural features that led to the designation of each site as an NAP and to maintaining natural processes. Among other issues, the management plans will specify what public access is allowed, where access will occur, and how it will be managed and monitored, using the following guidelines:¹

Human use on NAPs generally will be limited to:²

- Authorized non-consumptive uses that focus on scientific study or educational purposes,
- Appropriate location, intensity, timing, and type of low-impact access outside of environmentally sensitive areas, when determined by the department through case-by-case analysis of each NAP to be consistent with conservation management and the primary purposes of research and education, or
- Traditional established aboriginal rights or treaty rights specific to the area.

¹ RCW 79.70.030(1)(b): "The plan must identify the significant resources to be conserved consistent with the purposes of this chapter and identify the areas with potential for low-impact public and environmental educational uses. The plan must specify the types of management activities and public uses that are permitted, consistent with the purposes of this chapter. The department must make the plans available for review and comment by the public, and state, tribal, and local agencies, prior to final approval."

² RCW 79.70.030: "In order to set aside, preserve, and protect natural areas within the state, the department is authorized, in addition to any other powers, to: (1) Establish the criteria for selection, acquisition, management, protection, and use of such natural areas, including: (a) Limiting access to natural area preserves consistent with the purposes of this chapter. Where appropriate, and on a case-by-case basis, a buffer zone with an increased low level of public access may be created around the environmentally sensitive areas."

Determination of public access and uses generally will occur within the management planning process, which will include review and comment by the public and state, tribal and local agencies prior to final approval. Baseline ecological data will be required to make a determination about public access opportunities. Efforts will be made to monitor the effects of any approved public access and practice adaptive management to eliminate unacceptable impacts.

Recognizing that resource limitations may not allow management planning to occur soon for each NAP, the department retains the authority to manage NAPs outside of the management planning process. As needed, the department may analyze and address specific management issues in a timely manner to assure protection of the natural features for which an NAP was designated.

The department may authorize land access for consumptive uses (such as hunting, fishing, trapping, or plant harvesting) only when:

- Determined by the department to be the most appropriate management tool to protect the natural features for which a preserve was designated, or
- Determined by the department, in consultation with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, to be the most appropriate wildlife management tool, or
- Determined by the department to increase an NAP's scientific or educational value when consistent with conservation management and non-degrading to the natural features for which the NAP was designated, or
- Determined by the department, for a specific circumstance, to be consistent with conservation management and the primary purposes of research and education, occurring outside of environmentally sensitive areas, and of appropriate location, intensity, and timing.

The department may limit access to a preserve until resources are available to develop and properly implement a management plan or to analyze specific access requests. The department will seek resources to accomplish these tasks and provide access to NAPs for scientific and educational purposes, and for low-impact public uses outside of environmentally sensitive areas as determined on a case-by-case basis per Chapter 79.70 RCW and this policy.

IMPLEMENTATION

The division responsible for NAPs will provide program guidance to the regions to implement this policy. The division will also provide scientific assistance for ecological inventories, data and trend analysis, and management activities.

The regions will develop site management plans using the guidelines developed by the division. If the region lacks staff or expertise to develop site plans, assistance will be provided by the division.

Management plans, public access issues analyzed and addressed outside of the management planning process, and consumptive uses on NAPs, other than emergency measures necessary to protect public resources, will be approved by the Natural Heritage Advisory Council and the region and division managers responsible for the NAP.

Approval Date:	(month/day), 2005	Approved By: <i>DRAFT</i> Doug Sutherland Commissioner of Public Lands
Approval Date:	(month/day), 2005	Approved By: <i>DRAFT</i> Bonnie B. Bunning Executive Director

SEE ALSO
[Chapter 79.70 RCW](#) - Natural Area Preserves Act
[Chapter 79.71 RCW](#) - Natural Resources Conservation Areas Act
State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan